



FIVE AWARENESS-RAISING ACTIVITIES

TO CARRY OUT AMONGST COLLEAGUES

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The following exercises have been adapted from a tool called the GLSEN Lunchbox (see 'Homoparental Families Guide'). They were designed to help spark discussion on how to fight homophobia and become more inclusive of homoparental families. The exercises can be used as part of a training session, or simply as informal activities between colleagues (for example, over a lunch break).



WARM UP ACTIVITY

LENGTH: **10 MINUTES**
GROUPS OF **10-15 PEOPLE MAXIMUM**

Material: none.

ROUND TABLE

Objective: To provide an opportunity for all participants to express themselves before launching the discussion.

Description: Ask participants to form one or two circles so that everyone can see each other. Ask a question and have each participant respond briefly, one at a time. There should be no comments or responses in between. This gives participants the chance to express themselves freely, without facing questions or objections. Participants should be limited to short statements. The activity should not take more than 10 minutes. The questions, which should help guide the workshop, could be as follows:

- 1 **What do you hope to get out of today's session?**
- 2 **How are homoparental families included or excluded in your school/institution?**
- 3 **Name one of your concerns about including homoparental families and addressing the topic of homophobia in your school.**

EXPANDING YOUR NOTION OF FAMILY

LENGTH: **50-60 MINUTES**

GROUPS OF **10-15 PEOPLE MAXIMUM**

Material: Photos from the 'Homoparental Families Slideshow' (see 'Families with LGBTQ Parents' section) and a clip from Youtube about homoparental families (it's your choice!).

Objective: To help participants explore the similarities and differences they perceive between homoparental families and other types of families.

Description: Ask participants to look at the photos of homoparental families. Use the following questions to help encourage a discussion:

- 1 **What do you see in the photos?**
- 2 **What emotions, feelings and thoughts can be understood from these photos? How can you tell?**
- 3 **Which of your perceptions of gays and lesbians are reflected in these photos?**
- 4 **Which of your perceptions of gays and lesbians are not reflected in these photos?**

After the group has observed and discussed the photos for around 10 minutes, show a video clip which documents the day-to-day lives of homoparental families.

After showing the clip, use the following questions to help participants start a discussion:

DISCUSSION

- 1 **What do the families in the photos and the video have in common?**
- 2 **To what extent are your perceptions of gays and lesbians reflected or not in the families in the video and in the photos?**
- 3 **For what age or what grade of students would the screening and discussion of the video and the photos be appropriate? Why?**
- 4 **What do the photos and video tell us about our own work in schools? Is it possible that some of our students hide their family situation?**
- 5 **What could we do to be more attentive to our students' lives and offer them better support?**

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

LENGTH: **30-40 MINUTES**
GROUPS OF **5-10 PEOPLE MAXIMUM**

Material: Index cards and pencils, chairs placed in two rows, facing each other.

Objectives: To provide an opportunity for participants to practice responding to the concerns that may be raised during a discussion about homoparental families at school. To help educators recognize that despite a wide range of personal and religious beliefs concerning homoparental families, schools can still be supportive and proactive, creating a safe and encouraging environment in which children with gay or lesbian parents can learn and grow.

Description: To introduce this activity, discuss with participants the fact that homoparental families and homophobia are controversial topics. Many people have very clear-cut personal or religious views about sexual orientation. The controversial nature of these topics can be exacerbated when it is a question of discussing them with school-aged children. Educators and parents may thus raise difficult questions.

Explain to participants that this activity is meant to help them understand the importance of being proactive in their support of children from homoparental families, no matter their own personal beliefs. It should also be explained that everyone has the capacity to answer these delicate questions, but rarely the opportunity to practice.

STEP ONE

The participants are divided into groups of 5-6. Each group receives 10 or so index cards and a marker. Each group tries to come up with specific concerns that might be raised by parents about the school's intention to be inclusive of homoparental families and fight homophobia. Each concern, usually in the form of a question, should be written on a separate card. Each group must complete 8-10 cards. Collect the cards from each group and mix them up.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

STEP TWO

Chairs should be placed in two rows, facing each other. Ask participants to form teams of two and sit facing their teammate. Give a card to each person in one of the rows. Ask these participants to **play the role of an educator who is not convinced** that it is a good idea to talk about homophobic harassment or implement a program that is inclusive of homoparental families. The partners without the card must place the role of **the principal or a school administrator** and try to respond to their partner's concern. Provide 2-3 minutes for the role-playing. Collect the cards, and shuffle them again.

STEP THREE

Participants change partners and spots. Participants from one row shift one seat over, so everyone has a new partner. The row that played the principal or administrator previously now receives a card, and plays the role of an **unhappy parent**, while the other plays the role of the principal or administrator.

STEP FOUR

For the third round of role-playing, shuffle and redistribute the cards. The partners now take on the roles of **fellow colleagues** (teachers, daycare workers, administrators, etc.). The partner who receives the card plays a **colleague not yet convinced** that a proactive approach to dealing with homophobia and its impacts on homoparental families is the right strategy. The other colleague tries to respond to these concerns.

DISCUSSION

- 1 How did this activity affect you? Was it difficult or easy to respond to the concerns?
- 2 What are the questions most likely to be raised by parents, colleagues and administrators at your school about this topic?
- 3 What are some useful strategies for responding to people's concerns?

EVALUATION OF YOUR INSTITUTION

LENGTH: 20-30 MINUTES INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP ACTIVITY

Material: photocopies of “Institutional Climate Survey” (in the ‘Safe and Inclusive Environments’ section).

Objective: To provide an opportunity for staff to evaluate where the school stands in its fight against homophobia and its inclusion of homoparental families.

Description: The first step for schools in becoming more inclusive towards homoparental families is evaluating current policies and the existing climate. The “Institutional Climate Survey” is an effective tool for school personnel to assess the current policies and practices that include or exclude children from homoparental families.

Distribute the survey to all participants for them to fill out individually. As they work, place a large sheet of paper that has a line for each survey question and its possible responses.

Invite participants to indicate their own results on the poster, creating a running tally. If the participants come from different institutions, this will help them compare their practices with those of other schools. Different schools can use different colour markers. For example, one participant might indicate that her school includes sexual orientation in its antidiscrimination policy, while 12 of the other 15 participants indicate “no.” If all participants are from the same school, this exercise could still reveal different individual perceptions of certain elements.

When the results are recorded, start a group discussion. Talk about the aspects that make a school (or schools) more or less inclusive. Observe the trends that have emerged and the impact they might have on schools and students. Guide participants in exploring what concrete changes can be made from their newly acquired knowledge. Invite people to consult the “Best Practices Guide” (in the ‘Safe and Inclusive Environments’ section) for ideas of future strategies.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Do your school’s policies and practices include or exclude families and, more specifically, children from homoparental families?
- 2 (If applicable) How does your school compare to others in this regard?
- 3 What is the impact of current policies and practices on students and the school as a whole?
- 4 In your opinion, what changes should be made? How can we initiate these changes?

COMMON LANGUAGE

LENGTH: **30 MINUTES**
SMALL GROUPS

Material: descriptions of scenarios (see below).

Objective: To help participants reach a consensus on the best ways to react to homophobic or heterosexist behaviour in primary schools.

Description: Divide participants into groups of 5-6 people. Give each group 15 minutes to read aloud and discuss the following primary school scenarios (a different scenario is given to each group). Ask participants to use the following questions as a starting point:

- 1 What is happening in the scenario?
- 2 What issues are brought up?
- 3 What are the possible responses to this scenario?

If a group finishes their discussion of one scenario, give them another. After the groups have talked for 15 minutes, gather everyone together and have a representative from each group summarize their assigned scenario and the most appropriate responses decided upon by the group. Participants may raise questions about each scenario. When each group has shared their perceptions and questions, use the following questions to lead a whole-group discussion:

- 1 What could be done in our school to proactively prevent this scenario from occurring?
- 2 What type of mutual support can we offer each other to respond to this scenario?
- 3 How can we respond to the concerns of parents about how we have handled this scenario?

COMMON LANGUAGE (CONTINUED)

SCENARIO 1

Ms. Fortier, a primary school teacher, has made a list of age-appropriate books and activities. The list reflects family diversity and includes homoparental families. From what she has heard, she knows that several of her students have gay or lesbian parents, and she wants to make sure that the experiences of all her students are reflected in the books and activities used in class. While talking about this initiative with a teacher from another school, Ms. Fortier realizes that parents may complain when they find out that “homosexual issues” were covered in class discussions. She isn’t sure what the principal’s opinion is on the matter and doesn’t think that the school has a policy that supports this practice. As she is a new employee, she doesn’t want to rock the boat.

SCENARIO 2

Although he doesn’t like to worry them, over the past few months, Michel has complained to his parents, Robert and Émile, that other children make fun of him during recess. The kids call Michel “homo” and “gay.” One of the children even said that Michel’s dads were “fags.” Twice now, Michel has complained to his second-grade teacher and to the teacher supervising recess. The supervising teacher told Michel to “just ignore the kids and move away from them when they say those things.” His classroom teacher told him that she had not heard things like that in class, so she couldn’t do anything about it. Although Michel started the year eager to learn, he has become discouraged, and often says he wants to stay home. Robert and Émile don’t know what to do. They have spoken to Michel’s teacher, but feel that the issue was dismissed. The teacher and the principal seem to get defensive in their communication with the two parents. Robert and Émile don’t want to make waves, and they are worried that Michel will be even more of a target for teasing if they follow up too aggressively.

SCENARIO 3

Although he is a fairly good student and particularly gifted in math, Samuel is always the last to be chosen when they make teams for basketball during the sixth grade PE class. He runs fast, but his ball-handling techniques are a bit weak. The teacher always asks the most athletic boys in the class to choose players. Samuel, as well as two other boys, are always left until the very end. One of the star players then asks, “Do we have to take Samuel? He’s such a wimp. He throws like a girl.” Sometimes, this encourages the other boys to mutter, “Ya, Samuel is gay.” These comments tend to follow Samuel to class, in the hallways, the schoolyard and the cafeteria. Sometimes teachers ask students to stop, but the insults still continue, especially when no teachers are around. Samuel avoids the schoolyard during lunch hour, preferring to sit alone under a big maple tree. Not much motivates him to go to school. He loves math, but hates himself. He is worried about going to high school next year, since he’s heard that bullying is worse there and that he’ll probably get beat up a lot.

COMMON LANGUAGE (CONTINUED)

SCENARIO 4

Carolyn is divorced from her husband, Gilles, with whom she shares custody of their five-year-old daughter, Julie. Carolyn's partner of four years, Lynne, is actively involved in raising Julie. During the week, Julie lives near the school with Carolyn (her biological mother) and Lynne (her mother's girlfriend). On Friday afternoons, Gilles goes to pick up Julie and brings her home to spend the weekend with him, about an hour's drive away. The three adults in Julie's life get along well and share more or less the same ideas on how to raise her. They all agree to support Julie so that she can become assertive and confident. While registering Julie for kindergarten, the school's secretary indicates that only two parents—Carolyn and Gilles—can be included on official forms. Their protests go unheard. They cannot understand why Lynne's name cannot also be included on the documents. Carolyn's job takes her out of town for a week at a time, and she would like Lynne's role as a parent to be respected and recognized during her absences. The school's refusal to make a small modification on the form in order to include all three parental figures in Julie's life shows that the school is not as open or as inclusive as they had hoped. They are stuck, however, because they want Julie to attend a school that is nearby, not one on the other side of town.





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